

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

281019Z Jan 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000164

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA, DRL/CRA

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01-28-14

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: Maldivian Democratic Party organizers harshly criticize President Gayoom in meetings with emboffs

Refs: 03 Colombo 2201, and previous

(U) Classified by Bruce Lohof, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Conoffs and Poloff recently held separate meetings with organizers for the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Both men harshly criticized President Gayoom's government and advocated the creation of a multi-party system in the Maldives (political parties are currently not allowed). The MDP appears to be increasingly active as an organization, indicating that discomfort with Gayoom's long rule may be growing. The fact that a high-level GoRM official attended Conoffs' meeting with the MDP leader was also potentially telling. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) MEETING WITH MDP LEADER: On January 21, Conoffs met Ali Didi, the recently appointed head of the Maldivian Bureau of Penitentiaries and Rehabilitation, who was on a visit to Colombo. Accompanying Didi to the meeting, unexpectedly, was Mohammed Nasheed, the head of the MDP (see background in Para 6), who gave emboffs a brief readout of the party's history and platform. After September 11, 2001, Nasheed claimed that there had been a spurt in the number of Maldivian Islamic extremists active in the Maldives, especially in the more remote atolls. Nasheed said the MDP wanted to counter the dangers of a possible fundamentalist backlash with democratic thought and representation, which he said was sorely lacking under "the repressive (President) Gayoom regime." Nasheed also expressed concern over the large number of Maldivian youth who he said were tired of repression, but, lacking a democratic option, might turn to fundamentalism. Nasheed stated that the MDP did not want to overthrow the Gayoom regime, but rather wanted to create a multi-party democratic system, which the Maldivian Constitution provides for but has not yet been realized in practice.

3. (C) Nasheed emphasized to Conoffs that he felt the MDP had a solid window of opportunity to influence the GoRM. The government, he said, was very worried in the aftermath of rioting in the capital of Male' in September 2003 following prison violence on a nearby island (see Reftels). Nasheed saw this rioting as an example of burgeoning unrest brought on by repression under Gayoom and thought the incident highlighted the need for democratic political participation.

4. (C) While Nasheed was discussing the MDP and making anti-Gayoom comments, Didi -- who is a high-level GoRM official personally appointed by the president -- listened carefully and did not object. It was not clear, but it appears that Nasheed and Didi are related. Didi gave no indication that he was a member of the MDP, but he did say that he thought there needed to be political change in the Maldives.

5. (C) KEY ORGANIZER'S COMMENTS: In an earlier meeting, poloff met with Mohammed Latheef, a high-level organizer for the MDP (see background para below), on January 8. This meeting also took place in Colombo. Latheef recounted his hopes for the MDP, saying that he wanted the group "to bring human rights to the Maldives." He went on to lambaste Maldivian President Gayoom, who he said had a "Baathist mentality" and "beat the stuffing out of his citizens." Latheef asserted that there had been a groundswell of support for the MDP in the Maldives, particularly since the September 2003 rioting in Male'. He had "no doubt" there would be more violence in the Maldives if Gayoom -- who he said was "very sick" (NFI) -- did not leave power or failed to at the minimum increase democratization. Turning to the group's political prospects, Latheef predicted that if the party were allowed to register in the Maldives, there would be a large number of people rushing to join. There was "no way" Gayoom could stand against the MDP in free and fair

elections, he averred.

16. (C) ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND: The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) was founded in embryonic form in 2001 when a group of about 40 Maldivians, including former and current members of the Maldivian Majlis (Parliament), petitioned to register the group as a political party in the Maldives. The petition was rejected by the Majlis after the GoRM reiterated that political parties would not be allowed to form in the country. Since that time, the two main organizers of the party, Mohammed Nasheed and Mohammed Latheef, were removed from their Majlis seats following convictions on criminal charges for which they spent time in internal exile and detention. Human rights groups have alleged that the charges were trumped up by Gayoom and his allies in order to punish Nasheed and Latheef for their political activities. Both men now spend most of their time in Sri Lanka, where they have been attempting to build the party in exile. They asserted that the MDP now has about 90 members in the Maldives and elsewhere. Nasheed and Latheef have been making the rounds of embassies in Colombo; the UK High Commissioner recently met a MDP delegation, for example. Nasheed seems to be in his 30s and Latheef in his early 50s.

17. (C) COMMENT: The MDP appears to be increasingly active as an organization, indicating that discomfort with Gayoom's long rule (he recently celebrated his 25th year in power) may be growing. The fact that a high-level GoRM official attended Conoffs' meeting with the MDP leader was also potentially telling. At this point, the MDP's political platform seems hazy and focused broadly on an anti-Gayoom message. It is not readily apparent what their resource base is, though the MDP now has a website (www.maldiviandemocraticparty.org) which was recently set up. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD